

York Times, April 11. Nick Corasaniti and Reid Epstein did an analysis, page by page, of what the Georgia law would do, and it was pretty clear why they did it. President Biden won Georgia by just 11,779 votes—11,779—out of 5 million.

The new law that has been proposed and has been signed by the Governor of Georgia will curtail ballot access for voters in booming urban and suburban counties, home to many Democratic voters.

Another provision makes it a crime—a crime—to offer water to voters waiting in line. Of course, those waiting in line tend to be in densely populated communities and largely minority communities.

Some of the things that the Georgia law will do:

Voters will now have less time to request absentee ballots.

Georgia has cut by more than half the period during which voters can request an absentee ballot, from . . . six months . . . to less than three.

This will most certainly reduce the number of people [seeking] absentee ballots and the number of people who actually vote. In the last Presidential election—

And this is the key sentence that defines the goal of the Georgia legislation.

In the last Presidential election, 1.3 million Georgians—about 26 percent of the state's electorate—voted with absentee ballots. Of those who returned absentee ballots last year in 2020, 65 percent voted for [Joe] Biden and 34 percent chose Donald J. Trump.

Do you understand why the Republican legislature wants to put an end to the absentee ballot?

The shorter window will limit opportunities for get-out-the-vote efforts and put strain on new local election boards, which . . . have less time to process ballots.

There are strict new ID requirements for absentee ballots.

Previously, Georgia law required voters to simply sign their absentee ballot applications. Now they . . . have to provide a number from a driver's license or an equivalent state-issued identification. This is virtually certain to limit access.

It is now illegal [under the new Georgia law] for election officials to mail out absentee ballot applications to all voters.

When the coronavirus pandemic hit last year, Georgia's [Republican] secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, . . . mailed absentee ballot applications to every registered voter in the state ahead of its June primary. This led to absentee voting by record numbers of Georgians.

When Mr. Raffensperger didn't mail applications again for the general election, several local government agencies did so, particularly in Georgia's large urban counties.

This is a move that is now being made illegal by the law created by the legislature and signed by Governor Kemp.

With the loss of automatically mailed applications, some voters will invariably not request a ballot, since the application served as a reminder to people that were eligible to vote.

Keep in mind, it wasn't the ballot that was sent without solicitation; it was an application that had to be returned by the voter before they actually received the ballot. It was a re-

minder, one that the Georgia legislature would like to drop.

Speaking of dropping, "drop boxes still exist for absentee ballots . . . but barely."

For the 2020 election in Georgia, there were 94 drop boxes across the four counties that make up the core of metropolitan Atlanta: Fulton, DeKalb—

They pronounce it "DeKab"; we call it "DeKalb."

—and Gwinnett.

The new law limits the same 4 counties to a total of 23 drop boxes, from 94 to 23. And it won't just be fewer drop boxes to deposit your ballot. "Instead of 24-hour access outdoors, the boxes [are] placed indoors at government buildings and early-voting sites and will thus be unavailable for voters to drop off their ballots" in the evening and nonbusiness hours, which means more reliance on mail and the uncertainty of that.

With mobile voting centers—as they say in the New York Times, think about "an RV where you can vote"—"more than 11,200 people voted at the two vehicles at Fulton County in the last election." These vehicles traversed the county during voting periods, effectively bringing polling sites to people. "Georgia has now outlawed this practice."

Under the Georgia law, early voting has expanded at a lot of small counties but not the most populous ones. The strict rules will affect Georgians who actually work traditional hours for a living. They will have less flexible schedules and fewer opportunities to vote.

I spoke to you about the single greatest outrage:

Offering food and water for voters waiting in line now risks [criminal] misdemeanor charges.

Long lines for voting in Georgia are an unfortunate reality, and are often found in the poor, densely populated communities that tend to vote Democratic. During the primary election last June, when temperatures hovered above 80 degrees with high humidity, multiple voting locations across the State had lines in which voters waited more than two hours.

Now they will be denied access to water and food.

If you go to the wrong polling place [under the new Georgia law], it will be . . . harder to vote.

It put strict requirements there.

If election problems arise, a common occurrence, it is now more difficult [even in court] to extend voting hours.

With a mix of changes to vote-counting, high-turnout elections will probably mean long, long waits for results.

And we remember what happened last year when, during that period of calculating, President Trump went to town with all sorts of bizarre theories rejected by scores of courts as to voter fraud that never was found.

Election officials can no longer accept third-party funding, (a measure that nods to rightwing conspiracy theories) [that President Trump is also peddling].

With an eye toward voter fraud, the state attorney general [manages] an election hotline.

The Republican-controlled legislature has more control over State Election Board.

The secretary of state, for his audacity in challenging Trump's vote fraud theories, has been officially removed as a voting member of the State election board by the legislature in Georgia.

The GOP-led legislature is empowered to suspend county election officials.

The bottom line is this: The Georgians didn't waste any time taking a look at the voting results where they lost two Senate seats for the first time in history and decided that they had to change the rules. Too many voters showed up, the wrong voters, so they decided to change the rules and make it more difficult for those, particularly minority, voters who wanted to come and express themselves by the right to vote.

So the question now is, What are we going to do about it? Well, the a local chamber of commerce, Coca-Cola, Delta Air Lines, and others have made it clear that this is an outrage. It is one that we shouldn't countenance or accept in the 21st century.

This, unfortunately, was an exercise in the 19th century to reenslave African Americans after the Civil War. Sadly, vestiges of that continued, right up until the 1960s when the new Civil Rights Act ended up banning some of the most outrageous conduct that came out of the Jim Crow era.

Now the Republican Party nationally, the Georgia Republican Party, the Governor, and the legislature have decided to return to those days. What a sad commentary it is on Mr. Lincoln's Republican Party.

It was embarrassing enough as a Democrat to realize that the earliest stages of Jim Crow were created, conceived, and enforced by the Democrats of their day. For the Republicans, they fought that effort, as they should, in the name of Lincoln and what he brought to their party nationally. Now, today, the tables have turned 180 degrees. It is the Democrats who are trying to bring to the public's attention what is happening in Georgia and in other States. It is sad that the Republicans have decided that the only way to win an election is to control the vote, that their ideas can't be sold anymore to voters across this country.

#### BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH WEEK

Madam President, no community in America has been spared from the COVID-19 pandemic. Nationwide, we have lost nearly 570,000 mothers, fathers, grandparents, neighbors, and friends. In Illinois, the number is 21,000.

Like so many other diseases and health conditions, the pandemic has inflicted disproportionate harm on communities of color: Black Americans, Native Americans, and members of the Latinx community. Sadly, these disparities come as no surprise. America has a long history of medical inequality. From premature births to premature deaths, people of color suffer disproportionately in America's troubled health system. People of color in

America suffer more chronic and acute health conditions; they are likely to go without needed medical care; and they have shorter life expectancies. The reasons for the disparities are many, but they include access to affordable healthcare, inadequate research, and too few healthcare professionals of color.

Martin Luther King, Jr., called healthcare inequality the most shocking and inhumane form of injustice. Far too often, this inequality begins even before birth. It should shock the conscience of America—one of the wealthiest nations on Earth—that we have one of the poorest records on the globe for maternal health.

Think of this: The United States is 1 of only 13 nations in the world wherein the maternal mortality rate—the death of mothers—is worse now than it was 25 years ago. How is that possible? Every year in America, nearly 1,000 women die from pregnancy-related complications, and 70,000 others suffer near fatal complications as a result of pregnancy.

Now think of this: Women of color in the United States are two to three times more likely than White women to die as a result of pregnancy. In Illinois, sadly, that number is six times more likely. What makes these maternal deaths even more tragic is that an estimated 60 percent—more than half of them—are preventable.

I have given much thought to this and have spoken with real experts, which is why ROBIN KELLY—the Congresswoman from Illinois—and I joined with Senator DUCKWORTH and a number of other Democratic Senators in introducing legislation to decrease America's rates of maternal sickness and death, especially among new mothers of color. We call our measure the MOMMA Act.

One of the major provisions of this legislation is a requirement that Medicaid provide health coverage for new moms for a full year post-pregnancy instead of just 60 days, which it currently is. Congresswoman KELLY and I worked hard to get a modified version of this provision in the American Rescue Plan, President Biden's singular achievement in his first few weeks in office. Thanks to the law, States now have the option to expand their Medicaid programs for new mothers for the next 5 years.

Making sure that new moms have health coverage for a full year post-pregnancy will go a long way toward catching, preventing, and treating potentially life-threatening conditions and problems. This is critical because, in some States—even in my State of Illinois—nearly 60 percent of pregnancy-associated deaths occur between 43 and 364 days postpartum.

Well, there is good news to report today. While we are still working to pass the MOMMA Act, the State of Illinois pursued another avenue for expanding Medicaid coverage for new moms. For over a year, Illinois has been seeking a Medicaid section 1115

waiver to allow Medicaid-eligible women in our State to keep their health coverage for a year after their pregnancies.

Representatives KELLY, UNDERWOOD, Senator DUCKWORTH, and I have been leading letters and championing this effort from our State, and, this week, I am happy to announce that the Biden-Harris administration granted that waiver, making Illinois the very first State in the Nation to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage for new moms. This will ensure access to vital health services, help to promote better birth outcomes, reduce the rate of maternal sickness and death in my home State, and, I hope, set the stage as a model for other States to follow.

I can think of no better way to honor this year's Black Maternal Health Week than to support State efforts to expand Medicaid healthcare to new moms. Another way would be to pass Senator BOOKER's 2021 Black Maternal Health Week resolution, which I am proud to cosponsor.

As poet Maya Angelou told us, we cannot change the past, but when we know better, we must do better. We now know that we can do better to protect the lives of pregnant women and newborn babies, and I am pleased that my State of Illinois will be part of leading that effort.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Madam President, today, in Chicago, at the Lurie Children's Hospital—one of our best—little 1-year-old Kayden Swann is in critical condition, clinging to life in the pediatric intensive care unit.

Last week, at 11 a.m., on a Tuesday morning on Lake Shore Drive—one of the busiest thoroughfares in the city—1-year-old Kayden was shot in the head while riding in the backseat of a car. He was an innocent victim hit in a road rage shooting.

As we pray for Kayden's recovery, as we express gratitude for the medical workers who are working around the clock to keep him alive, we have to ask ourselves a basic question: When it comes to this sickening gun violence that happens every day in our country, what are we going to do? Give up or stand up?

On March 23, I held a hearing on gun violence in our Judiciary Committee. There was a mass shooting spree that killed eight people in Atlanta, GA, on the day I announced the hearing. Then there was a mass shooting in Boulder, CO, that killed 10 people the night before the hearing. Others have followed.

Since that hearing on March 23, according to the Gun Violence Archive, there have been at least 38 mass shootings in less than a month in America, where a "mass shooting" is defined as an incident where at least four people were shot. This past weekend—and I am sorry to say this is not an exception—25 people were shot in the city of Chicago alone. Every day, we lose 109 American lives to gun violence. Hundreds more are shot and wounded, car-

rying physical and emotional scars for a lifetime. These victims are our neighbors, our friends, our families, and even a 1-year-old baby like Kayden Swann.

I am glad President Biden is stepping up to this issue and taking action. Last week, the President stood in the White House Rose Garden and called gun violence exactly what it is. It is a public health crisis. He is right. We need to take a public health approach to reduce the violence that is killing so many of our fellow Americans.

There is a playbook that works. We need to gather data and study the problem, identify causes and risk factors, and develop targeted prevention and intervention strategies that will help to bring the number of shootings down. We have stopped epidemics before—we are in the midst of one now—and we can do it again if we are willing to stand up and act. It works.

President Biden took action last week and announced a set of common-sense steps that are consistent with the Second Amendment and that actually will help reduce violence. He wants to reduce the proliferation of homemade "ghost guns," which are untraceable and often undetectable; regulate the use of stabilizing braces that can effectively convert pistols into short-barreled rifles, like the weapon that was used by the gunman in Boulder; put forth a model State extreme risk protection order law that would help States that want to use these interventions; restart an annual firearms trafficking report that tracks patterns of illicit gun trafficking; nominate a gun safety expert David Chipman to give the ATF its first confirmed leader since 2015. I am going to pay special attention to this nominee because it will come through the Senate Judiciary Committee.

How many times have you heard it said that we don't need new laws; we just need to enforce the laws that are on the books? One of the Agencies that enforces these laws is the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, or ATF. What the gun lobby has done over the years is to make sure the ATF hasn't had the money or hasn't had any leaders. We haven't had anyone in the post for 6 years at the ATF with Senate confirmation. I want to change that if we can.

Last, but certainly not least, the President announced billions of dollars for evidence-based community violence intervention programs through the American Jobs Plan and other grant program efforts. These are smart, targeted, and important proposals that are well within the bounds of the Constitution and the President's authority. I commend him for that action.

Yet we shouldn't leave it to the President alone. We have a responsibility, too. We have to make sure we close the loopholes in the gun background check system that make it too easy for criminals and those with mental instability to get guns. We have known it for years, but we haven't